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SUBJECT: SETTING THE SCENE FOR COMMANDER, U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND'S JUNE
19 VISIT TO TAJIKISTAN

CLASSIFIED BY: Tracey Jacobson, Ambassador, U.S. Embassy
Dushanbe, STATE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[11](#). (C) Executive Summary. Embassy Dushanbe welcomes you on your first trip to Tajikistan. This will be an important step in forging personal relationships with key Tajik leaders. We enjoy friendly relations with this small but strategic country on the Afghan border. In addition to DoD and CENTCOM military and security-related programs, we view economic and democratic development as integral components to ensuring long-term regional stability.

[12](#). (C) Five months after the presidential election secured President Rahmon a third seven-year term, Tajikistan seems to have stalled on the road of reform. Throughout 2006, Rahmon assured international visitors and his public alike that "after the election," new blood and new ideas would take Tajikistan to a new era of economic prosperity and open civil society. You will find a Tajikistan that has set aside the promises of the November 2006 election, and a government that is less worried about international perceptions and more confident in tightening its control over society and the economy. President Rahmon's ministers and advisors continue to argue for the need for stability before democracy, and economics before politics.

[13](#). (C) Despite these trends, Tajikistan is an extremely important country worthy of your time and investment as CENTCOM Commander. Tajikistan has significant opportunities to prosper, which if seized, will provide additional economic and strategic options. However, Tajikistan also faces significant transnational threats that could affect regional and international stability. Of primary significance to both Tajikistan and the United States is the future of Afghanistan.

[14](#). (C) The key theme that you can emphasize, both in your bilateral meetings and in the press opportunity, is that Tajikistan's long-term security and economic prosperity are closely linked to its progress in advancing democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. This message is counter-intuitive to President Rahmon and many of his advisors, and strong and consistent messages from high-ranking U.S. interlocutors will play an important role in slowing (or reversing) Tajikistan's slipping toward authoritarianism and corruption.

Background - Reform

15. (C) Negative trends. Instead of steering his country towards much needed reform and growth, we see a number of worrying tendencies in Rahmon's leadership and government. Tighter government control, a smaller, less competent inner circle, little political will to go beyond rhetoric and increasing signs of public restiveness are a few of the negative trends we see. Increased unconditional economic assistance from China and Iran undermine the importance of creating a business climate that attracts private investors, and the pernicious little-brother-big-brother relationship with Russia works against the U.S. (and European) programs on rule of law and good governance. Without sufficient incentives to correct these growing tendencies, Tajikistan will risk becoming a less stable, less prosperous country mired in poverty, unemployment and clan politics.

16. (C) Political reform. The Tajik government is still not sold on the benefits of democratic reform or political openness. It looks at Ukraine, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and its own civil war, and questions what good could come out of allowing more political expression and the development of political parties. They may not like Uzbekistan, but the Tajiks admire the "stability" Karimov's regime has wrought and count on the international community to give Tajikistan leeway as long as it remains better than Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan -- the bad examples in the region. We must convince the Tajik government that creating democratic institutions and practices -- such as a reformed judiciary that promotes rule of law, a parliament that is educated and engaged in legislating, rather than serving as a rubber stamp, and a freer media to inform its citizenry -- are steps that will actually be in the government's interest, and not threaten President Rahmon's authority.

17. (C) Economic reform. Economic reform is more palatable, and the government has taken a few small steps towards improving the

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investment climate, such as a new law on inspections that could cut the number of inspections in half, a new Committee on Investments and State Property and an Agency to Fight Corruption and Economic Crimes aimed at rooting out corruption on all levels. How these new initiatives are implemented will demonstrate how serious Tajikistan is about linking itself to the global economy. Thus far, progress is slim.

18. (C) The Tajik response. Government officials will likely try to parry any discussion of better governance and democratic reform with a request for U.S. investment in the economy and infrastructure. Given the steady flow of state-funded investment from China, Iran and Russia in hydropower, transmission lines, telecom, roads and tunnels, the Tajiks will be looking for the same kind of engagement from the United States -- and will be less interested in hearing that they should improve their business climate to attract private companies.

Economics

19. (C) Economics before politics. During your short visit, you may be pleasantly surprised by the veneer of Dushanbe's active consumer economy, which hides the underbelly of massive corruption and industrial decay. The government, including the recently renamed Foreign Minister Zarifi and President Rahmon (going back to their Tajik roots), insists on talking "economics before politics." However, they turn a deaf ear when we insist that only reforming their business climate will attract Western investors, and are insulted by the suggestion that corruption scares off businesses. They point to over \$800 million in no-strings-attached Chinese loans they have received for infrastructure projects, and tell us to bring American companies to Tajikistan.

110. (C) The investment climate. Although there is some enthusiasm for U.S. investment and requests to send American

companies to Tajikistan, there are few substantial examples of what the Tajiks are doing to create an attractive environment or recruit international businesses beyond vague talks of "fighting corruption" and a "law on foreign investments" that has yet truly to protect the few international firms that run into problems. Cross-border trade faces customs challenges, visa issues, and political mistrust. Courts do not always uphold contracts or the rule of law. Investors bristle at the hassle of Tajik corruption; repeated demands for money from low and mid-level officials across the government dissuade entrepreneurs. Small businesses flourish outside the official economy trading agricultural and consumer goods, avoiding taxes and customs fees.

Regional Integration

¶11. (C) The Uzbek problem. Although the Tajik government shares our enthusiasm for regional integration, deep down, they may not share the same fundamental vision. Tajik officials define "region" differently, and cannot talk about regional issues without including Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan causes Tajikistan serious problems with electricity and gas, customs, imports, exports, visas, landmines, water sharing and even locusts.

¶12. (C) Energy as an export. As part of the emphasis on regional integration, the United States is pushing for Tajik hydropower to be exported to Pakistan and Afghanistan. A major issue is who will pay for the electricity once it is produced. To that end, the United States is working in Afghanistan and Tajikistan to develop the regulatory environment. We are also currently facilitating the negotiation of a power purchasing agreement between Tajikistan and Afghanistan, and are encouraging U.S. private sector participation in the development of hydropower and related infrastructure.

¶13. (C) New bridge to Afghanistan. Tajik officials and businesspeople are very excited about the opening of the U.S.-funded bridge at Nizhniy Pyanj, of which DoD was the prime financier, designer and implementer. The bridge will allow the Tajiks more opportunity to bypass Uzbekistan and look to South Asia as a commercial destination and partner. The bridge should open in August with Afghan President Karzai, Tajik President Rahmon, and a high-level U.S. delegation attending. We are hoping that Secretary Rice will also attend although her schedule is not yet confirmed. The Tajik Foreign Minister floated the idea of a high-profile commercial convoy crossing

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the bridge carrying export goods from Tajikistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan as part of the opening ceremony. Security issues in Afghanistan may prevent the convoy from traveling south at the official opening, but it's a vision that supports our concept of regional economic integration.

Security and Military Structures

¶14. (C) Balancing Russia and others. Rahmon has not changed his "open door" policy of working with all countries, yet Tajikistan is still primarily influenced by Russia and this factor significantly colors its security perceptions. The presence of the 201st Russian Military Base effectively supports the existence of the Rahmon regime. Russia also maintains a relatively constant stream of black propaganda against U.S.-led initiatives and activities in Tajikistan and Central Asia. There was considerable Russian pressure on cabinet appointments during the December 2006 government reshuffle. The presence of Russian Border Advisors, while greatly decreased, still leaves Tajikistan with an overseer, who does not necessarily always have the Tajiks' best interests in mind. Tajikistan also deftly balances China, Iran (see Dushanbe 786 and IIR 6 947 0016) and India, as well as membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty

Organization (CSTO).

¶15. (C) Tajikistan's Armed Forces. The Tajik Armed Forces consist of numerous power structures which, in the absence of an over-arching security strategy, regularly scrap for roles, missions and very limited resources. President Rahmon clearly has a hierarchy of favorites within his security establishment, with the National Guard falling out on top and the Ministry of Defense (MoD) generally getting the leftovers. The Main Department for Border Forces, recently reorganized under the State Committee for National Security, falls in the middle of this spectrum.

¶16. (C) Ministry of Defense. Adrift in roles and missions ranging from counter-terrorism to homeland defense, often specifically focused on the proverbial Uzbek threat, the Ministry of Defense is the weak link in U.S.-Tajik military relations. As a fighting force, the Tajik Land Forces are extremely limited in capability, their Air Force virtually non-existent. General-Colonel (U.S. 3-star equivalent) Sherali Khairulloev has just completed his twelfth year as the Tajik Minister of Defense. A repeated message from Khairulloev dwells on his preference for receiving material goods (called 'technical assistance'), vice training and reform-oriented support. We try to dispel this notion as often as possible. In the past six months he has focused on improving his officer corps starting with the military educational system, requesting assistance for the high-school and college-level military educational institutions, a goal we are seeking funding to support as it will enable us reach the incoming generation of younger officers. The Minister and his entrenched mindset are the main obstacles to improved military relations between the U.S. and Tajikistan.

¶17. (C) National Guard. The National Guard fulfills multiple roles, ranging from counter-terrorism to homeland defense, yet it is primarily designed to protect the Rahmon regime and respond to him personally. Essentially, they are President Rahmon's own Praetorian Guard and they clearly receive the priority of fill and perks within the Tajik defense establishment. The Commander, General-Major (U.S. 1-star equivalent) Rajabali Rahmoniliev is a young, comparatively progressive thinker, and hailing from the President's hometown of Danghara, can be considered one of Rahmon's staunchest allies outside of his own family. The National Guard is arguably the most competent conventional/limited special operations capable force in Tajikistan. The National Guard has successfully completed three iterations of SOCCENT JCET counter terrorism training, with a fourth JCET to begin in August 2007.

¶18. (C) Border Forces. The Main Department for Border Forces, reorganized under the State Committee for National Security in the December 2006 post-election reshuffle, is commanded by a young MoD-bred officer, General-Major (U.S. 1-star equivalent) Sherali Mirzoev. The reorganization has yielded some retrenchment in U.S.-funded border-related programs, although these are probably due more to the State Committee on National Security oversight of the Border Forces than to Mirzoev's personality. Ostensibly done to consolidate and improve border control, the Tajiks probably viewed this as a "normal" return to the former Soviet model of Border Guards as a wing of the

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intelligence and security service, a step most post-Soviet countries have made. Given the numerous cross-border/transnational ills that plague Tajikistan's borders, this arm of the Tajik power structures should be one of the most focused. Yet the lack of a comprehensive border management strategy still hinders the effective utilization of embassy and international assistance. State Department International Narcotics Law Enforcement (INL)-funded programs including the construction of a Border Forces Academy and border outpost refurbishments continue to be at risk because of the Border Force's lack of transparency and direction. Likewise, the Border Guards initially rejected joint training with Afghan Border Guards at an INL-funded training facility, but responded

to international concern expressed by donors at the Ambassadorial level, and joint training will go forward.

Theater Security Cooperation

¶19. (S//NF) U.S.-Tajik Defense Cooperation. Tajikistan, by reason of geography, occupies a strategic location in the Global War on Terrorism. By reason of history, Tajikistan is viscerally concerned with stability in Afghanistan, which directly affects Tajikistan militarily, economically and in terms of population movements. Tajikistan was an early supporter of OEF operations, even offering a base at Kulyob, a fact which the President may mention. The most direct route from Manas Air Base to Afghanistan is over Tajikistan (as it was from K2 base in Uzbekistan). Tajikistan has been extremely permissive, granting blanket overflight clearances and divert and refueling options, although the latter two are rarely used. (Note: the French Air Force maintains a small detachment at Dushanbe Airport, which supports ISAF operations with cargo and close air support.) Tajikistan also has LNOs in CENTCOM's Coalition Village, and offered forces to Afghanistan, which was turned down due to the no-neighbors policy and a suspicion that they were probably offering more than they could support. Although the Tajik President did not respond positively to 2006 Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld's probes on basing here, citing

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his need to get along with all his neighbors, nevertheless, Tajikistan is proud of their contributions to the war on terrorism.

¶20. (U//FOUO) CENTCOM Theater Security Cooperation. Tajikistan cooperates with the U.S. military through the CENTCOM annual military-to-military (MTM) contact program. A fairly robust series of information exchanges (14 in 2006, 16 thus far in 2007), numerous Marshall Center events and participation in multi-lateral exercises and 4 SOCCENT JCETs are all aimed at improving Tajik military capabilities, defense reform and extending governance to the far eastern mountainous regions of Tajikistan. The Ministry of Defense, National Guard, Main Department of Border Forces, and the Committee for Emergency Situations all participate in our military cooperation events. Through the State Partnership Program and annual MTM program, Tajikistan has an excellent relationship with the Virginia National Guard mostly focusing on NCO/Officer technical skills and professional development, with some disaster response events sponsored by the State Department EXBS program. ARCENT and CENTAF also provide expertise for events focusing on search and rescue in the mountains, logistics and other military capabilities. Tajikistan marginally participates in NATO and EUCOM exchanges, but has participated in Marshall Center programs since 1993. Tajikistan has also recently been approved for participation in the Global Peacekeeping Operations Initiative, funded at \$1.5 million, provided conditions are met.

¶21. (U//FOUO) CENTCOM also provided \$5 million in counter narcotics funding for the construction or renovation of 3 border crossing stations, projects just getting underway on the Tajik-Afghan border. State INL funding has been used to build/renovate several other border post facilities. CENTCOM counter narcotics funding is also being used in a multi-year program to provide an integrated communications system which will link the Border Forces from the border to their regional and national HQ, and provide interagency communications between the Border Guards, the MOD, and the Drug Control Agency. The embassy appreciates CENTCOM support in the important areas of border security and counter-narcotics, primarily focused on the Afghanistan border.

¶22. (U//FOUO) U.S. Security Assistance. Current security assistance programs focus on improving capability of the Tajikistan armed forces in the areas of tactical and strategic communications, emergency response, English language, and in building a future leadership with Western principles. FMF/IMET

funding levels for FY07 are \$250K/\$343K, DoS requested for FY08 \$675/\$565K, and DoD requested for FY 09 \$600K/\$700K.

Proposed Talking Points

123. (U//FOUO) During your bilateral meetings with the President and Defense officials, Embassy Dushanbe recommends Commander, USCENTCOM, emphasize the below-listed talking points. Note that in general, the Tajiks do not absorb subtle messages well, so some level of bluntness is recommended.

--(U//FOUO) We consider security to be not just an issue of military capability; rather we believe that democratic and economic development are essential for long-term stability. This is why DOD sponsors "non-military" training on topics such as fighting corruption. Regarding economic development, supporting growth of small and medium enterprises and reducing barriers to investment, such as corruption, will render significant long term benefits for Tajikistan.

--(U//FOUO) Likewise, the United States values adherence to human rights obligations - religious expression, media freedom, minority rights, civil society and education as much as it values military security. A strong military is composed of a well-educated corps of professionals who are trusted to make decisions appropriate to their authorities and who are guided by a duty to protect the interests of the people they serve.

--(U//FOUO) Global War on Terrorism - We appreciate Tajikistan's continuing support to the United States in the Global War on Terrorism. The generous SOFA, blanket overflight clearance and emergency divert agreement granted to DoD are a significant gesture of support, save valuable time and resources and significantly support the development of a stable Afghanistan.

--(U//FOUO) As you prepare for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit in August in Bishkek, we urge you to work to further those common goals on Afghanistan, and also ensure the SCO and its participants recognize the important role Manas Air Base, in particular, and our efforts in Afghanistan in general, play in promoting broad-based stability and prosperity in the region.

--(U//FOUO) Afghanistan remains a subject of great concern for both our countries. The entire world has an interest in bringing stability to Afghanistan, and we welcome Tajikistan's positive contribution to this effort. We welcome more joint initiatives with Afghanistan and continue to look for ways to integrate Tajikistan and Afghanistan economically. We welcome the positive role Tajikistan can play in building Afghanistan's capacity.

--(C/REL Tajikistan) We noted with concern your recent joint statement with the Iranian government that you would support its efforts to become a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Iran's participation as an SCO observer nation is already problematic. While it continues to defy the international community and the UN Security Council by refusing to stop its weapons-related enrichment and reprocessing activities, Iran may try to use the SCO as a platform to seek support for its activities.

--(U//FOUO) Greater military proficiency and ultimately better regional security cooperation is best achieved through training and exercises. The USG appreciates positive steps to improve cooperation with the armed forces of Tajikistan, but further progress is essential. USCENTCOM builds capabilities. We do not provide equipment without training, and in fact we are more interested in providing training than equipment. The units that we train must be real, operational units, with defined roles, missions and responsibilities. A well-trained soldier can learn to use any sort of equipment in different operations.

--(U//FOUO) We are pleased with the counter-terrorism training

being conducted with SOCCENT and special operations forces of the National Guard and the Border Forces. We would like to see more responsiveness from the Ministry of Defense and more accountability, access and transparency with the Main Department of Border Forces. A possible area of significant cooperation with the Ministry of Defense is the offer for Tajikistan to join the Global Peacekeeping Initiative, if conditions are accepted.

Proposed Speaking Points for Press Opportunity

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¶24. (U) The Tajik media is largely self-censoring and as such will probably not ask difficult or stumping questions. This is an excellent opportunity to relay the below messages on behalf of the Country Team, as well as engage a generally neutral-friendly audience, who gains most of its information from the Russian media.

--(U) The United States considers security to be not just an issue of military capability; rather we believe that democratic and economic development and the respect for human rights are essential for long-term stability. This is why DOD training includes some "non-military" topics such as fighting corruption.

--(U) We consider Central Asians themselves at the center of our approach to this part of the world, and we reject any notions that Central Asia is merely an arena for outside powers to compete for influence. Tajikistan is not the object of America's geopolitical struggles with anyone. We aim to support your goal of an independent nation whose citizens have the opportunity to realize their destiny. This is why we are funding and constructing a \$35 million dollar bridge along with associated Border Control and Customs facilities, to facilitate legal traffic between Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

--(U) Tajikistan is an extremely important country to the United States for several reasons:

--Americans take particular interest in helping emerging nations such as Tajikistan achieve their own goals of independence.

--Tajikistan faces significant transnational threats that are important to regional and international stability. Of primary significance to both Tajikistan and the United States is the future of Afghanistan.

--It is in U.S. interests to join Tajikistan and its regional partners in combating these threats and further supporting Tajikistan's development and strategic options.

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